THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

Vol. 3, No. 10 November, 1964

FOR THE MAN WHO HAS EVERYTHING . . .

By the time you receive this issue, there will be just about 40 shopping days left until Christmas. If you're anything like us, you probably have a friend, or a sweet old aunt - maybe even a wife - who just isn't oriented when it comes to what you'd like for Christmas.

You say you have this problem? Well, if you're tired of traumatic Xmas neckties, and want a gift this year that really swings, we've got the answer. Enclosed with this Newsletter is a promotional folder for RSR #2, complete with handy order form. Just fill this in and pass it along to you-know-who with the appropriate hint. (And if by any chance you missed out on RSR #1, be sure to put in a word about the Special Offer combination: both Ragtime Society records for just $8.50 - the ideal Christmas bargain.) Better do it now, before you're slated for the traditional tie that binds.

Remember - we produce these records for you; we expect you to buy them and help us promote them among your friends and fellow ragtimers. Word of mouth is the finest kind of advertising, but if you would like a supply of the "Tom Shea Plays Ragtime" folder to help spread the gospel, drop us a note.

WE'RE HAVING A PARTY!!!

For three years now, we've been telling ourselves that we should hold some sort of a get-together for Society members - and we've finally been able to make arrangements.

Although distance will make it impossible for many, we cordially invite every Ragtime Society member to join us at Jim Kinnear's Red Carpet Saloon, Temperanceville, Ontario, on Saturday evening, December 12th. Wives, husbands and sweethearts are welcome, but we regret we can't extend the invitation to other non-member friends.

The evening will be devoted to RAGTIME - playing, singing, listening and plenty of talk. The Saloon is equipped with two pianos - a white open-front Gerard Heintzman upright with hardened felts, and beside it a Millard & Snarch upright player (on which both Society LP's were recorded). Plus a rare 65-note Aeolian Pianola, and lots of collector's items in the way of rolls. Other facilities include a record player and tape recorder.

About liquid refreshments - you know best what you prefer, so bring your own. We'll lay on the rest: glasses, ice and mixers. There will also be coffee and things to nibble.

The party gets under way at about 8 p.m. Come early, stay late, and be prepared for lots of RAGTIME!

PLEASE - help us out by letting us know whether you are coming; return the reply card (below) just as soon as you can. Before the end of November we will send you complete instructions and a detailed map showing how to get to the Red Carpet Saloon. We'll be happy to supply information about local hotel-motel accomodations for out-of-town members.

We look forward to seeing you December 12th!!

SHEET MUSIC

The latest in a line of excellent ragtime folios to appear this year is Max Morath's long-awaited GUIDE TO RAGTIME, which has just been published this month by Hollis Music, Inc.

> "The vitality and honesty of true ragtime guarantees its long life, once fully rediscovered. That's why we present this folio, not as a museum piece, but as a primer to that lively and wonderful music that is just now awakening from its half century of hibernation."

. . . so claims the folio on page one; and with justification,

(continued next page)

The Ragtime Society,
P.O. Box 8,
King, Ontario,
CANADA

Yes, I'll be there on December 12th!

The name of my wife/husband/friend is _____

I would like information about accomodations at ( ) nearby motels
( ) Toronto hotels

Comments:

Name _____

Address _____

_____

in the opinion of this reviewer. Its 128 pages are complete with photographs, line drawings and illustrations of the era, and are further divided into the following categories:

Before Ragtime . . .	8 numbers
The Cakewalks . . .	8 numbers
Classic Ragtime . .	7 numbers
Rag Songs	12 numbers
Ragtime Today . . .	10 numbers

Each section is preceded by a page or more of the familiar and excellent Morathian prose which traces, illustrates and accentuates, as only Max can, the particular era being dealt with. He further discusses each number at some length, and these discussions tend to amplify and enlarge what is contained in "They All Played Ragtime."

Of particular pride to us is the fact that compositions by two Society members are included in this top-quality folio: Tom Shea's "Trillium Rag" and Teddie Beth Smith's "The Good Years."

Max's GUIDE TO RAGTIME is available from the Society at $4.00 postpaid.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Just a reminder that your Society membership comes up for renewal at the end of this year. All memberships now run on a January to January basis, and we sincerely hope you will be with us as we go into our fourth year of promoting ragtime.

If you renew now - before the end of December - the rate will be the usual $2.00, which includes your 1965 membership and your subscription to the Newsletter. As of January 1st the rate will be upped to $3.00 to cover increased production costs. Save a buck - fill in the membership renewal form below and mail it now.

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FUTURE SOCIETY LP'S

Plans are already under way for RSR #3, which we hope to produce early in 1965. Here's the story behind it:

During August, we received a tape from Vincent Terbois, our enthusiast in Geneva, Switzerland. This tape contained over two dozen rags played by Neville Dickie, our member from Wallington, England. When we first heard these numbers, we very nearly placed a transatlantic phone call to Neville to see if he would consider doing a Society LP.

In a word, this guy is terrific! His playing is very exciting - a slightly different style than we normally hear in North America, and with a lot of wonderful and refreshing touches. Like the few other English ragtime pianists we've heard, Neville plays with an uncanny sense of syncopation that makes you want to get up and do a buck-and-wing. In addition, he injects a puckish sense of humor into the music, and the whole thing adds up to real enjoyment.

We know you'll get a kick out of hearing Neville Dickie's ragtime style, and we'll keep you posted on our plans for RSR #3.

Also on the books for 1965 is at least one LP of piano rolls, both 88- and 65-note, and possibly an album featuring a mixture of live performances and piano rolls.

OLD SHEET MUSIC

Do you have some old sheet music of rags which are not listed in the appendix of "They All Played Ragtime"? If so, we'd like to hear about it - for two reasons:

First, if it is Public Domain material, and of sufficient quality, we would like to borrow it briefly to make a copy for the Reprint Club.

Secondly, one of our long-term projects is the compilation of some of the lesser-known rags as a supplement to the appendix in the "bible." This will be published during the coming year.

If you'd like to help us on these projects, please jot down (a) the title of the rag; (b) name of the composer; (c) date of copyright or composition.

Please do not send us your sheet music yet - just a list of what you have, plus any interesting stories about how or where you found it. We'd also like to hear about any rare piano rolls in your possession, particularly 65-noters.

The Record Changer - February 1949
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ASSORTED

RAGS

by roy j. carew

One evening in the spring of 1938, while at the dinner table, I reached over to the radio and turned it on at random, giving no thought to what program might be on, and got a pleasant surprise. A fine piano solo was coming over the air. After a few moments of listening, I said to my wife: "Listen to that number,—that's the kind of piano the boys in New Orleans used to play," or words to that effect. At the end of the selection the announcer gave the player's name, none other than Bob Zurke. I am pleased to recall the incident, as it reminds me that away back in the early days, New Orleans had considerable fine piano.

One little group of piano players included Joe Verges, Leonard Bysdorfer, Irwin P. Leclerc; those who like to think that good jazz had to come out of honky tonks should have heard these boys having a session on a Sunday afternoon at the Monteleone Hotel. Another good ragtime player should be mentioned with the group—Harry Farrar, who just missed out in a couple of chances for a place in jazz history; in 1915 Harry and a jazz group went to Chicago and played the summer season. About 1916 Harry made a recording of a hot rag on a wax cylinder (probably a Dictaphone recording), and sent it to the *Victor* firm, but nothing came of it. He could play in any key, but preferred six flats.

Bob Zurke was one of the players that Jelly Roll Morton had kind words for, and contrary to general belief, there were a number of others. I believe it was largely due to his unstinted praise that Tony Jackson began to get some of the credit that he deserves as "the greatest single-handed entertainer."

One day I mentioned Roy Bargy to Jelly, and he agreed unhesitatingly that Bargy was a fine pianist. Bargy wrote some very good rags at the tag end of the ragtime era, and recorded them for *Victor* in the early 1920's: *Knice and Knifty/Pianoflage* (Vi. 18969), and others. Bargy made some use of what has been referred to as "secondary rag," which in my humble opinion belongs more to novelty than to ragtime, although it is found in many rags. I don't recall that Scott Joplin ever used it. In his *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid*, Winthrop Sargeant, mentions the *Cannon Ball Rag* by Northup (1905) as the first published example of secondary rag, but a simpler form of it occurs in *Levee Rag* (1902) by Charles E. Mullen, one of Northup's contemporay Chicagoans. Mullen was still living in 1930, but I haven't heard of him since. The second part of *Levee Rag* was used in at least two other rags, *Easy Money* (1904) and also the *Cannon Ball.*

If a catchy strain appeared in a number, there were many who didn't hesitate to pick it up and use it, which resulted in its appearance in widely separated parts of the country. Fragmentary bits of tunes, partially learned by folks, and whistled or hummed about the streets, would be picked up and built into rags or songs. A couple of bars from a part of *Tiger Rag* used to be current around New Orleans and was known by it into a song; I built a rag around it, and didn't know it was in *Tiger Rag* until years later. A "ratty" tune that used to be heard around New Orleans and was known by some as "If you don't like the way I walk," was later arranged into a pretty good song called *Mama's Baby Boy.* The impudent and rather personal "Hey, Brownskin, who you for?" of the New Orleans gamins was put into two songs, one published in New Orleans and one in Chicago. . . .

A kidding or catchy remark, if it became current, was almost sure to get into a song. When I worked in Gretna from 1904 to 1906, the office boy used to sing a sort of blues strain, "You may go, but this will bring-a-you back," illustrating with an appropriate gesture. Later I found that several songs had been written with that title, one of them by Ben Harney, who gets some credit for pioneer ragtime activity. Harney's song was published in 1898, and he must have carried the idea, if not the song, to New York from the midwest.

Harrison Smith calls attention to the fact that many Dixieland standbys were Tin Pan Alley tunes, which certainly is a fact. In the article *Scott Joplin: Overlooked Genius* (Record Changer, 1944), it is stated ". . . in publicizing the musicians who developed and spread jazz music, there has been a lack of consideration given to . . . the early musical environment of the players, to the popular musical compositions that were current in the early days." However, it is also a fact that many Tin Pan Alley hits have been, consciously or unconsciously, versions of honky tonk strains from the provinces, or have contained large portions of "strains from the alleys." Early examples are May Irwin's *Bully Song,* and *Ta Ra Ra Boom De A,* the latter coming out of Babe Conner's dive in St. Louis to make a hit, first in London and then in this country. I don't believe it would be difficult for a good tune detective to identify strains from old tunes in many of the more recent hits. Those who doubt might compare *Ta Ra Ra Boom De A* with a couple of "modern" tunes, *Across the Alley from the Alamo,* and *I Wonder, I Wonder. . . .*

When ragtime was young and very popular, nearly every aspiring writer utilized it in his original compositions, or in ragtime versions of familiar songs, such as *Old Black Joe, Annie Laurie, Home Sweet Home,* as well as the classics. Felix Mendelssohn wrote a *Spring Song;* Egbert Van Alstyne wrote *Darkies' Spring Song;* Joe Jordan write *J. J. J. Rag,* the first part of which is almost identical with the first part of *Darkies' Spring Song.* Jordan was the composer of *That Teasin' Rag,* which went into the *Dixieland One-Step,* if my memory serves me. Otto Bonnell wrote a rag version of *Turkey in the Straw,* which is a direct descendant of *Old Zip Coon,* published in 1843. . . .

I looked up the original of *Old Zip Coon,* thinking to get at an early manifestation of ragtime, but it had none in it. It did, however, furnish an early example of "scat" singing,—"O, zip a duden duden duden, zip a duden dey." In *The Ham Fat Man* (1863), we find more of it,—"Hoochee, coochee, coochee," which is more likely to have been baby talk than any reference to Little Egypt's hoochee coochee dance. In Stanley Crawford's *Show the White of Your Eye,* there is "Bo-lo, Bee-dle Em-bo." In the song *If That's What You Want Here It Is,* by Shepard N. Edmonds, there is "Ba dee-dle lee do-dle lo-dle lo," and more.

As to extemporaneous "scat," my old friend Bill Sommers, a semi-professional singer in New Orleans some forty years ago, told me that he was never at a loss for the words to a song. "If I forget 'em," he said, "I use my own words, or substitute something that sounds like words." So-o-o-o, Louis Armstrong doesn't exactly stand alone. Once in a while there is something new under the sun, but not too often.

RECORD REVIEW

"Joseph Lamb: A Study in Classic Ragtime" - Folkways Records FG 3562

Cottontail Rag	The Alaskan Rag
Excelsior Rag	The Ragtime Nightingale
Cleopatra Rag	American Beauty Rag
Sensation - A Rag	Contentment Rag
Topliner Rag	Patricia Rag

Plus four interviews with the composer

Scott Joplin died in 1917 without having made a single phonograph record, which seems understandable. James Scott died in 1938 without having graced a recording studio either, which seems difficult to believe.

Joe Lamb died in September, 1960. Barely eleven months before (and an incredible ten years after Blesh and Janis tracked him down), Joe had been persuaded to record this Folkways LP at his home in Brooklyn. "Joseph Lamb: A Study in Classic Ragtime" is easily the most significant - and providential - ragtime recording ever made.

Joe was 71 years old when he played these ten pieces; he hadn't played some of them for years and, to make matters worse, he had become partially deaf. Despite these obstacles, this is a heart-warming and dignified performance by the last of the three great classic composers.

Every ragtime enthusiast will benefit from this record, if only because it expresses so well the great beauty of Lamb's compositions. This is not a gaminesque and fragile beauty so often found in Joplin and Scott pieces, but a more profound and mature quality. Such pieces as "Topliner" and "American Beauty" prompted John Stark to credit Lamb with "the gift of melody and the genius of harmonization unsurpassed by any writer of popular music."

This record will be of particular value to pianists. It is the best possible evidence that classic ragtime - or at least Lamb's compositions - can and should be played slowly. Whereas Bob Darch will launch into "Maple Leaf" at metronome speeds of 100 and up, and Ann Charters plays Joplin in the 75-80 range, Joe Lamb lilts along at a sedate 65 or so. He implies quite firmly that anything much faster would be an affront to the music.

Joe admitted that, before this recording was made, he was rusty and out of practice; he rehearsed the forgotten numbers long and hard, and played the takes from the sheet music. Even so, his hearing impairment was a great handicap, and Joe hit his fair share of clinkers. Far from ruining the music, however, this serves to demonstrate the tremendous latitude a Lamb rag allows the performer while still giving very gratifying results. -Bob Ashforth

PERFORMER PROFILE

In the last issue we featured Jim Kinnear's account of a visit with "Ragtime Charlie & Sister Kate" of Ann Arbor, Mich. We asked Charlie Rasch if he'd tell us a bit more about himself:

"I've been playing Blues and Rags since 1954. Nine years before that I took classical lessons from a private teacher. She didn't mind the changeover. As a teacher, her main concern is for her students to simply enjoy music. For a while I couldn't play much of anything, Chopin or Ragtime.

"The first Rags I played were 'Maple Leaf' and 'Temptation' by Lodge. I found them in an antique store, while I was looking for old jazz records. It took about a month to learn 'Maple Leaf', one hand at a time. Next I started working on the 'Jelly Roll Morton Folio' from the Morris, Mayfair, Melrose series of Blues, Stomps and Ragtime. Jelly Roll was the first hot pianist to influence me. I was so enthused with his music, and played everything at breakneck speed. I found more Ragtime piano solo sheet music, and a hardbound copy of 'They All Played Ragtime.' Gradually, I began to understand a difference between Ragtime and Jazz on the piano.

"After hearing and studying Clarence Johnson's broken-tenth bass, I began to slow down and get some control over my tempo. Clarence Johnson was the piano man for Lizzie Miles on her blues records in the mid-twenties. He has a fine, easy 'lift' in his playing.

"I believe in playing a Rag solo pretty much as it appears on the score. If I change anything, it is usually minor. On some numbers I add accents or flourishes. I automatically play my normal octave-chord bass, unless something different appears in the score. 'Ma Ragtime Baby' and 'Slippery Elm Rag' have fine running octaves in the bass which I play as written.

"Some numbers sound a little thin right off the page. 'Down Home Rag' is one, and I add some bigger chords and thirds to it to give it more weight. On the other hand, I am forced to leave a few tricks out of 'Cascades' which is the hardest number for me to play.

"I have always regretted the absence of recordings of the Rag players when they were flourishing in the early 20th century. To get some idea on how to perform hot music on the piano, I have studied the old records from the twenties, mainly the blues records, where the singer is backed by a pianist. Aside from Clarence Johnson, I have learned from Lemuel Fowler, Clarence Williams, James P. Johnson, Steve Lewis, Speckled Red and Cripple Clarence Lofton, all of whom have recorded as piano soloists or accompanists for singers during the twenties. Some of these men made fine piano rolls. James P. Johnson's rolls are well known; Lemuel Fowler cut some rich Blues rolls, and Lewis made a great roll of 'Mama's Gone, Good-Bye' which is my favorite song.

"The embellishments these men put in their playing have helped me to render some of the 'crowd pleaser' popular numbers with Kate at the Old Heidelberg."

-Charlie Rasch

FROM OUR MAILBAG

Marge Traeger of Kennewick, Wash., wrote us an intriguing bit of news about something new in the line of mechanical piano players which she saw recently in Seattle:

"This is a new machine that has just been patented and they haven't even started to manufacture them yet. It is a player mechanism that sits on top of the keys of any piano. It seems to be quite unique. It will sell for in the neighborhood of $350."

We'd be very interested to learn more about this, Marge - could you keep us posted?

Mike Schwimmer, who spins discs at station WEEF in Highland Park, Ill., sent us these comments along with his order for Tom Shea's new record:

"My 'Rags, Stomps & Blues' show has now gone into its second year on WEEF, and we seem to get more and more requests for good ragtime, since it can be heard nowhere else on Chicagoland radio. Our interview with Trebor Tichenor, made while we were in St. Louis last spring, has been played twice on the show with good comment.

"We are now planning another trip to St. Louis on November 7th, and hope to get other members of the St. Louis Ragtimers on tape. If Bob Wright is down there, why we'll try to get him, too -- piano and all!

Mike adds that "it may be of interest to Society members in the Chicago area that I have discovered an excellent and reasonable source for player pianos. The gentleman's name is Tom Steuer, and he lives at 528 Burton Avenue, Highland Park, Illinois, 60035. Tom buys up old players and rejuvenates them with new keys, hammers, working parts or whatever is needed to put them in top-notch shape. You can get one of Tom's pianos for $250-400."

We're delighted to hear that you're spreading the word about ragtime so enthusiastically, Mike, and only regret that we aren't within range of station WEEF.

From Mr. Russell Cole of Eureka Springs, Arkansas:

"There's nothing like ragtime - and I'm old enough to remember the sudden and astounding rise of the ragtime song in the mid-Nineties. Who knows how far back the evidences of ragtime go? Would any of your members deny that old 'Zip Coon' qualifies in the category, or profess to have proof that even that early song was a pioneer in the field of the delayed beat? Countless were the ragtime songs and instrumentals of the 'Boom-de-Ay' to 'Darktown Strutters Ball' period. Like many another delightful piece of merchandise, the syncopation of the 'My Gal is a High Born Lady' to 'Don't Bite the Hand That's Feeding You' time found survival a real problem in the quicksands of the First World War."

TRY THIS ON YOUR OLD UPRIGHT . . .

This page of music is an actual sample of the ragtime being made available to members of the Reprint Club.

These rags are printed on durable 80 lb. Offset Book paper and we are quite proud of the quality and the readability of the music. Reprint Club members have already received the first three selections - and are guaranteed at least eleven more.

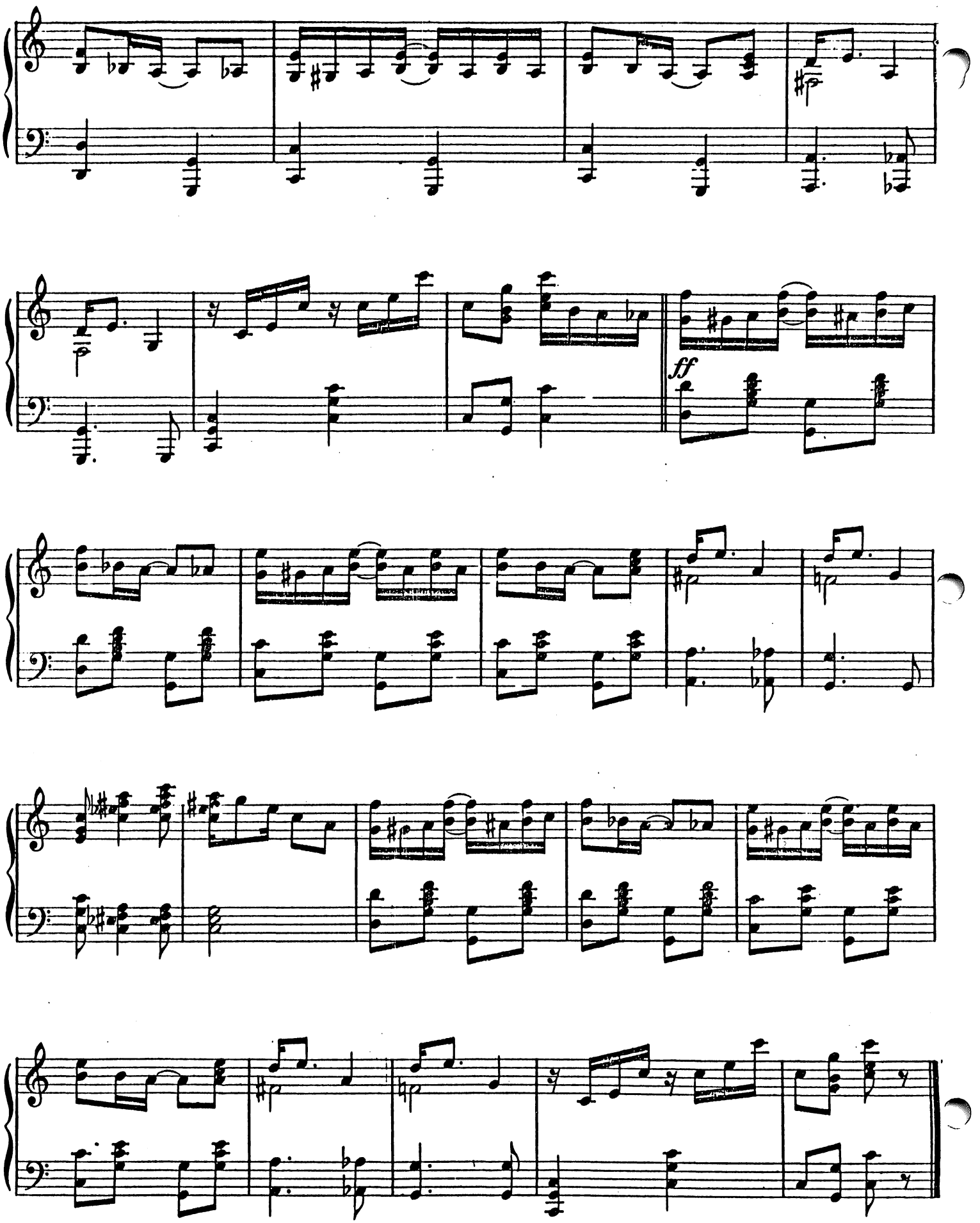
If you are a pianist, or a sheet music collector, why not join the Reprint Club - $10.00 in advance now brings you a minimum of 14 classic or early rags which aren't available elsewhere.

The Ragtime Society,
P.O. Box 8,
King, Ontario,
CANADA

Please enroll me in the Reprint Club - the $10 membership fee guarantees me a minimum of 14 rag reprints.

I enclose ( ) Cheque ( ) Money Order ( ) Cash

Name _____

Address _____

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